

Spectrum

Wounded Warriors swim with big fish

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Signal staff

(Part I of a two-part story about Wounded Warriors)

Wounded Warriors experienced swimming with gentle giants May 1 at the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta.

Cpts. Richard Winchester and Mark Munson, Dwight D. Eisenhower Army Medical Center chaplains, teamed up with Jeff Snover, Scott Winkler and Judie Thompson of Champions Made From Adversity organization, Sally Ecklund, a speech therapist, Sgt. Ernest Thacker, a squad leader, and Eric Gray, a recreation therapist, from the Charlie Norwood Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, to take active duty Wounded Warriors on a two-day trip to the Georgia Aquarium in Atlanta and an overnight stay at Camp Twin Lakes in Rutledge, Ga.

The Wounded Warriors came from among those receiving care at the Charlie

Norwood Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center and Warrior Transition Battalion at Fort Gordon

The trip provided the Wounded Warriors respite from their medical treatments and empowerment to do new and different things said Munson. It helps them understand they can still be the leaders in which they were trained to be in the military, he said.

Marine Sgt. Samantha Rosa, Spc. Jacob Dutro, and Seaman Kenny Powell, from the Charlie Norwood Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center as well as Spc. Jackie Thompson from Warrior Transition Battalion at Fort Gordon, swam or dived in an exhibit containing 6.3 million gallons of water and 450 different species of fish including whale sharks, zebra sharks, sawfish, and leopard whip rays. Experienced dive masters accompanied the service members in the water.

Staff at the Georgia Aquarium built a special diving platform and a dressing bench for the locker rooms to accom-

modate the Warriors' disabilities, according to Meghann Gibbons, Georgia Aquarium communications manager.

The dive and swim outing allowed the divers to test the Georgia Aquarium's new program "Swim with Gentle Giants" and gave the Wounded Warriors an opportunity to share their ideas about improving the program for individuals with disabilities, said Alex Desiderio, Georgia Aquarium staff and volunteer development manager.

At the conclusion of the program each participant received a certificate of completion of the "Swim With Gentle Giants" program and was officially made an ambassador of the Georgia Aquarium.

"We've been told that, in the

water, there are no disabilities, that we are all equal in the water, that we're whole again," said Snover, co-founder of Champions Made From Adver-

sity. And that it's a freeing experience and it was for everyone involved.

The trip was sponsored by DDEAMC, Department of Min-

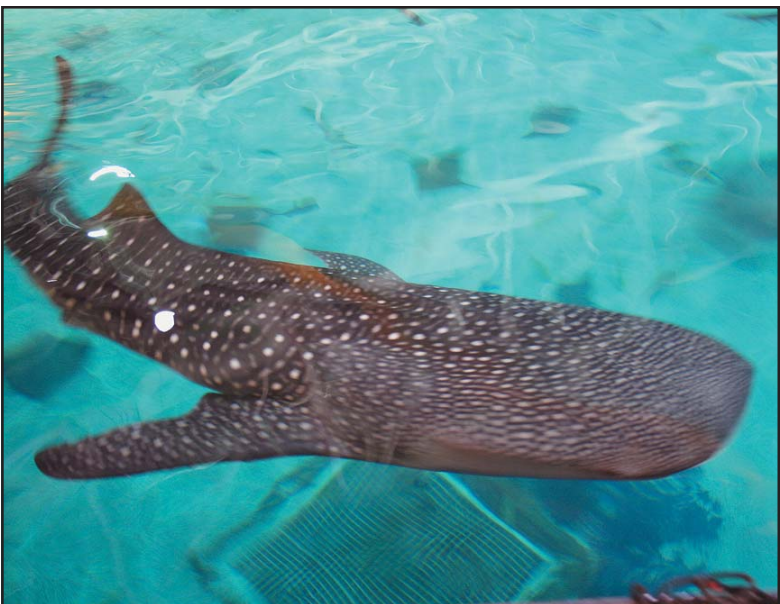
istry and Pastoral Care and funded by the Army Chief of Chaplains Wounded Warriors annual special offering from Army chapels worldwide.



(Above left to right) Eric Gray, a recreation therapist at the Charlie Norwood Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center; Spc. Jacob Dutro, a Wounded Warrior being treated at the Charlie Norwood Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center; Jeff Snover and Scott Winkler, founders of the organization Champions Made From Adversity, talk to local media May 1 before swimming with whale sharks and about 50,000 fish of 450 different species at the Georgia Aquarium located in Atlanta, Ga.



(Left) Master divers at the Georgia Aquarium assist **(left to right)** veterans Scott Winkler and Jeff Snover into wet suits and diving gear. **(Right)** Wounded Warriors accompanied by master divers relax and enjoy the water.



(Left) Wounded Warriors swim among Great Hammerhead Sharks, Cownose rays, giant groupers, Leopard whips, and many other fish in the 6.3 million gallon tank at the Georgia Aquarium. **(Above)** A whale shark, which can reach 40 to 66 feet as an adult, and is considered the world's largest fish, swims in a tank at the Georgia Aquarium. Known as the "world's largest aquarium" the Georgia Aquarium was funded largely by a \$250 million donation from Home Depot founder Bernie Marcus and his wife Billi Marcus.